



 Teaching
Commission

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT FOR ALL?

REPORT
JULY 2026



Our partners



CHAIR'S WELCOME

W elcome to the second report of the Teaching Commission.

Our first [report](#) presented our vision for the teaching profession, where

- Every lesson in every school is taught by a suitably qualified specialist teacher whose knowledge and skills are supported and developed throughout their career.
- Every school leader is supported to build professionally empowering school cultures where staff and pupils thrive.
- Teachers are valued, motivated, fulfilled and supported on their professional journey, enjoy good working conditions, reflect the diversity of society, and - importantly - choose to stay in the profession.
- Schools are focused on developing and sustaining cultures where staff thrive through a sense of belonging, meaningful development opportunities and worthwhile professional learning, and where they have a voice in institutional decision-making.

We set out comprehensive evidence showing the challenges and opportunities that the profession faces, and a raft of recommendations that are demanding and far-reaching. This was no quick fix, but steps on a journey towards our vision. We debated pupil behaviour, the importance of inclusion, professional development and school culture, along with the effects of accountability, funding and recruitment and retention pressures. Knowing that the government would soon propose a new national curriculum, we chose to postpone our discussions of this important issue until we had a clearer idea of what was coming.

This new inquiry takes the vision and principles of our first report and directs them towards the coming curriculum and its assessment. We ask how



the profession can be engaged in developing and implementing the reforms in ways that strengthen the professionalism and agency of teachers. The government is rightly ambitious for pupils and for teachers. As Commissioners we welcome its aspiration. Our report sets out what teachers and leaders need in order to bring that ambition to fruition in schools.

I would like to thank [Commissioners](#) who have given up precious time to explore evidence and share expertise. Thank you too to our witnesses, who gave us plenty to think about, and to all those teachers and leaders who joined discussion groups with the NEU and the Chartered College of Teaching, HeadTeachers Round Table and the Trust-Wide CPD Leaders Network. Your engagement has made sure we kept the conversations grounded in the realities of schools and classrooms. And finally, thank you to our partners, the NEU, NAHT, the Key Group, UCL Institute of Education, Schools Week and EducationScape, whose support has made this work possible.

Baroness Mary Boustead
Chair of the Teaching Commission



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [curriculum and assessment review \(CAR\)](#) and the [government's response](#) demonstrate high aspirations for all students. The review envisages a curriculum which is ambitious, future focused, rich in knowledge and broad in scope, designed to interest and engage all children with high-quality adaptive teaching to ensure a more inclusive education system. Teachers are described as 'curriculum-makers'.

The Commissioners welcome the ambition and vision of the 2028 curriculum.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE...

The implementation date for the 2028 curriculum feels far away, but there is in fact little time in which to make sense of the new proposals and plan for their implementation. The final curriculum proposals will be published in Spring 2027 which leaves four terms in which the teaching profession must plan its response to the new requirements. For some subjects, and particularly in primary, the changes will be substantial.

At the same time leaders will be engaged in planning for the implementation of the ambitious White Paper '[Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#)' which will drive significantly greater inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEND) in mainstream schools.

There is low awareness amongst teachers and leaders of the forthcoming changes to the National Curriculum.

Nearly one in ten primary leaders in a small survey reported that they are not aware of government curriculum plans and only 14% had read one or both of CAR and the government's response, and felt confident that they could record the details.

Teachers and leaders want clarity about the changed requirements, what is 'in' and what is 'out' in terms of subject content in the revised programmes of study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government must

- develop a clear communications strategy which explains how the curriculum review and its implementation aligns with the Schools White Paper, including SEND reform, so that schools are able to prioritise and plan coherent implementation.

- ensure that the new curriculum statements clearly differentiate what is essential and what is desirable and provide exemplification of a range of desirable components to encourage meaningful choices about depth and breadth.
- set out clearly what has changed, what has been removed and what added to the current National Curriculum. It should also state clearly the support and resources, particularly time, available for teachers to be 'curriculum-makers'.

In consultation with a range of subject, phase and cross-phase experts in curriculum design, the government must provide guidance on:

- coherent sequencing both within subjects and across the curriculum, including at points of transition (from EYFS to Y1, and from Y6 to Y7 in particular).
- integration of cross curricular themes.
- The digital model of the 2028 curriculum would be a good vehicle for some of these requirements.

Working with the profession, government must develop:

- exemplification to illustrate what provision in schools might look like after the removal of EBacc measures and the 2.5-3 hour reduction in GCSE exams, supporting schools to think deeply about how to use the ensuing 'slack' in the 2028 curriculum.
- guidance for Trusts and schools on how the change programme should be implemented, ensuring opportunities for real dialogue and collaboration with the profession so that they can achieve the ambition to be 'curriculum makers'.

Teachers in a range of different schools should be involved in testing and refining different elements of the new curriculum before its final implementation.

GOOD TEACHER SUPPLY WILL BE ESSENTIAL

The latest DfE data on teacher recruitment show that Initial Teacher Training (ITT) recruitment has improved, with primary above target. Fewer teachers are leaving the profession – down from 9% last, to 8.5% this year. The vacancy rate for teachers is reducing from its peak in 2023/4. The number of trainee teachers



enrolled in initial teacher training courses in 2024/5 was 6.3% higher than in the previous year.

These are very welcome improvements to teacher supply.

However, the new curriculum and the proposed changes to Assessment 8 will likely raise the demand for specialists in the sciences, arts, MFL and other subjects with longstanding under-recruitment. Without action to improve recruitment and retention, particularly to subjects which historically failed to meet ITT targets, more pupils could be taught by unqualified teachers. Realistically, there is just one year's ITT cohort in which to raise specialist coverage in subjects with the longest-standing shortages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- DfE should provide a detailed analysis of the teacher and leader recruitment and retention rate by regions, school type and subject.
- DfE should develop an implementation plan to address regional and by school type teacher shortages in particular subjects which goes beyond ITT recruitment targets (which fail to take into account historic under recruitment) and the 6,500 increase in teacher numbers. In particular there will need to be a strategy for recruiting arts teachers.
- A longer-term approach should be taken to bursaries which, evidence shows, help recruitment. Cuts in bursaries result in falls in application to ITT.
- Government should provide additional funding to disadvantaged schools to assist their recruitment and retention of qualified and specialist teachers

A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IS INTEGRAL TO ANY CURRICULUM REFORM

While there is currently an entitlement to CPD, the quality of the CPD offer and the lack of meaningful coordination and strategy means it is far less effective than it needs to be.

The government's approach to professional development to support the implementation of the 2028 curriculum has a welcome emphasis on schools working together locally and regionally. Commissioners believe this to be the right approach, one that is done with, rather than done to, the teaching profession. However, the plan reads like a list of current activities rather than a considered strategy for an evidence based, high-quality programme which could be adapted to the needs of different schools in different phases, settings and localities.

Commissioners were clear that the professional development programme must support and build teacher agency, enabling

teachers to make the right professional choices, based on sound evidence and informed pedagogical approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In consultation with a well-balanced range of experts, including serving teachers, subject associations and teacher professional networks, Government should develop a national programme of professional development to support the introduction of the 2028 curriculum, with a particular, initial focus on the new requirements – for example oracy across the curriculum; adaptive teaching; the teaching of creative subjects in primary etc.

This programme should be based on the following principles:

- Relevance to teachers and leaders in different phases of schools – including early years, primary and secondary.
- With a deliberate focus on developing professional identity and agency, contextual sensitivity and decision making so that teachers gain the professional capacity to understand why a practice works, when to deploy it and for what purpose.
- An inquiry design which supports the trialling and evaluation of new approaches by teachers within their own classrooms as essential to developing enhanced, contextualised, professional judgement.
- With high quality support materials which provide exemplification of good practice by phase and by subject, presented as a basis for discussion and further development by teachers and leaders (not tablets of stone). (These should include, but not be limited to, OAK.)
- With a focus on those areas of the curriculum (e.g. creative subjects) and on cross curricular themes and pedagogies (e.g. oracy and citizenship) which will necessitate significant growth in professional knowledge and pedagogical skills.
- With a focus on EDI so that teachers are able to weave EDI across the curriculum.
- The current review of national professional qualifications should reflect the growing need for leaders to support and develop a culture of professional learning.
- Rise Partnerships should be mandated to work with expert middle leaders to develop curriculum support programmes.
- Government should work with CPD leaders to develop an immediate strategy that supports schools to understand their own current curriculum strengths and weaknesses, so that future development is based on those areas and appropriately contextualised.



CURRICULUM REFORM IS LABOUR INTENSIVE

The first [Teaching Commission report](#) included compelling evidence on excessive and intensive teacher and leader workload. While there has been welcome improvement in workload and wellbeing, teachers and leaders repeatedly expressed concerns about the significant increase in workload that is likely to accompany curriculum reform.

There has, to date, been no indication of any extra time which will be made available to support preparation for the 2028 curriculum. Allocated preparation time, dedicated to familiarisation with the requirements of the 2028 curriculum and planning for its implementation, is essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A clear allocation of time within the normal working day should be given for teachers and leaders to engage in professional development and preparation for the implementation of the 2028 National Curriculum.
- Three extra inset days in 2027 and three more in 2028 should be focused on the preparation for and implementation of the new curriculum.

A BROADER CURRICULUM NEEDS SPACE AND RESOURCES

There are real concerns about the capacity of schools to accommodate a broader and more practically based curriculum. In many schools, practical learning has been reduced with a knock-on effect on teacher confidence. Many spaces for practical learning have been repurposed, and financial pressures mean that refurbishment has been delayed and is prioritised for essential repairs. Teachers and leaders do not know where they will find space and resources for practical learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Based on a clear statement of what every child should be entitled to experience in the revised curriculum, the government should survey schools to gauge their ability to practically and physically accommodate the 2028 curriculum.
- The government should put forward a coherent plan to fund resources needed for practical lessons, prioritising areas of greatest deprivation.

A WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF SUCCESSFUL CURRICULUM REFORM

Curriculum reform that is developed without strong reference to, and articulation with, the existing and/or developing education policy framework leaves the profession reconciling competing priorities and requirements.

The 2028 curriculum and the much greater inclusion of pupils with SEND within mainstream schools do not constitute a whole system approach – the policies are not sufficiently aligned. Unless the 2028 curriculum is designed to eradicate the barriers that the current National Curriculum and its assessment has created, too many pupils with SEND and those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds risk not fulfilling their potential. The government's ambition of increasing inclusion will not be met, and the attainment gap between these pupils and their peers will not be narrowed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government should ensure programmes of study, resources and associated professional development start from the need for inclusion, rather than adding it later.
- The government should establish, as the OECD recommends, a regular review cycle which can determine what is working well and what is not, and what must be changed in order for the aims of the 2028 curriculum, and the White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' to be achieved. This review must be wide ranging, taking into account all stakeholders, including the profession, and should result in a staged and ordered change which is understood by teachers and manageable in terms of workload.
- Government should conduct an evaluation of the proposals and programmes of study for the 2028 curriculum and its assessment through the lens of 'what does this look like' for pupils with SEND, low levels of achievement, low levels of certification and poor attendance, and those with high levels of achievement and motivation.

THE 2028 CURRICULUM REVIEW LEAVES THE ARCHITECTURE OF ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY LARGELY IN PLACE

The CAR argues that the current exam system contributes to high standards, reliability and fairness for young people although it also notes that the time spent taking exams in England is excessive



and the volume of exams can exacerbate the pressure that students feel. Consequently the government accepted the CAR's recommendation of a 10% (2.5 hour) reduction in exam time at GCSE.

The only explicit provision for low attaining pupils, many of whom will have SEND, is a post-16 level 1 stepped qualification offered to students who are awarded U to grade 2 in English and maths GCSE.

Commissioners were concerned that test preparation will continue to dominate and will be prioritised over teacher assessment literacy. Some aspects of the assessed curriculum will dominate and will be more likely to be prioritised within what is taught. The continued reliance on exam assessment risks a token coverage but actual neglect of important aspects of the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government should, as part of a regular review of the 2028 curriculum changes, review the effectiveness of its assessment reforms in light of:

- The extent to which a 10% time reduction in GCSE testing leads to improved pupil outcomes, particularly for those pupils with low attainment and SEND (and the extent to which 10% reduction in exam time actually translates in the reduction of content and test preparation time).
- The extent to which the profession is confident in the use of formative assessment to underpin adaptive teaching.
- Evidence that advises against over-reliance on high stakes end-point exams and tests by considering what forms of knowledge and skills require exam based assessment and what could effectively be assessed through modules, practical or teacher assessments.
- Commissioned research on the extent to which AI is misused in student assessment.

WE NEED A MORE STRATEGIC, LONGER-TERM APPROACH TO CURRICULUM REFORM

Commissioners strongly support the government's aims for the 2028 curriculum and its strong drive for more effective and greater inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, but have serious concerns about whether these ambitions will be realised in practice. The sense that the writers of the curriculum and assessment review 2028 developed their analysis and proposals in isolation from the authors of Every Child Achieving and Thriving is inescapable. The danger that inconsistent policy architecture will undermine the government's aims and the professional endeavours of teachers and leaders is real.

To this end, the Commission makes a final recommendation – that the implementation of the 2028 curriculum be phased in order to support ongoing evaluation of what is working and what is not.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government should, as is routine in other high performing OECD countries, adopt a cycle of regular, strategic and expert guided reform of the National Curriculum and its assessment.
- The new curriculum should involve a phased introduction, allowing for piloting and 'lessons learned' and a CPD strategy to be put in place incrementally, to ensure teacher engagement with the changes in a manageable way that helps to ensure quality of teaching and protecting teachers and leaders from overload.

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ALL CHANGE



All Change



This is a time of significant change in the English school system. 2028 will see the introduction in all schools of a new national curriculum concurrently with far-reaching changes to the support for students with SEND which will drive greater inclusion in mainstream schools. A new Ofsted framework has also recently been launched.

This enquiry examines how teachers and leaders should be supported to successfully introduce the new national curriculum (called the 2028 curriculum) and revised assessment arrangements within the context of these wider changes and significantly increased demands. Previous curriculum reforms have led to substantial additional workload, and we have only recently begun to see an improvement in working hours and wellbeing for the profession.

Whilst the implementation date for the 2028 curriculum could appear to be safely in the future there will only be a contracted period in which to make sense of the new proposals and plan for their implementation. The final curriculum proposals will be published in Spring 2027 which leaves four terms in which the teaching profession must plan their response to the new requirements. This will include

- developing curriculum materials and resources;
- considering new forms of pedagogy – including embedding oracy across the curriculum;
- a much greater emphasis on practical work in a range of subjects and a broader subject base;
- engaging in professional development to meet the challenge of change.

For some subjects and particularly in primary, changes will be substantial.

At the same time leaders will be engaged in planning for the implementation of much greater inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEND) in mainstream schools. The White Paper *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* aims to provide ‘a more inclusive mainstream school system where all schools consider the evolving needs of children and proactively work to remove barriers to attainment and engagement for every child, to the benefit of all’

(p34) and to ‘equip staff across education with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver excellence’ (p13). This requires expert leadership in developing teaching approaches and curriculum design within our mainstream schools which serve widely varying communities and have been unequally impacted by teacher recruitment challenges.

What are the government’s aspirations for the 2028 curriculum?

The [curriculum and assessment](#) review (CAR) and the [government’s response](#) demonstrate high aspirations for all students. The review and the government’s response envisage a curriculum which is ambitious and future focused, rich in knowledge and broad in scope and designed to interest and engage children with SEND, children who are ‘bright but bored’ and white working-class children, with high-quality adaptive teaching which will ‘recognise the strengths and abilities of all students’ to ‘ensure a more inclusive education system’.

The government also has strong ambitions for the teacher workforce

It recognises that teachers have a fundamental professional interest in, and responsibility for, the successful delivery of the 2028 curriculum. The curriculum and assessment review describes teachers as ‘curriculum makers’ interpreting and transforming the content in the National Curriculum to ‘author’ instructional events with students in the classrooms and within the context of their local areas, their schools and their pupils (p50). The drafting of the subject programmes of study must, CAR insists, involve teachers as well as be informed by subject specialists’ knowledge of the discipline.

Commissioners welcome the ambition and vision of the 2028 curriculum. It signals a fundamental shift towards a more physical, practical, social and developmental experience of schooling for children and young people, along with a focus on inclusion, belonging and joy for all pupils.



What are the key differences between the the 2014 and 2028 national curricula?

The key changes from the current National Curriculum introduced in 2014 include:

Significant broadening of the curriculum revitalising arts subjects with a requirement for 'breadth' and more detailed programmes of study in foundation subjects – art, drama and music as well as vocational subjects such as Design Technology.

More practical activity across subjects with hands-on learning as a default rather than an exception, and higher levels of pupils actively doing, making, leading and problem solving.

Community and social experiences that build belonging, contribution and citizenship.

Leadership and teamwork embedded routinely, not reserved for a small number of pupils.

Relevant employability and adult life skills including communication, digital fluency, problem solving, self management, financial literacy and practical competences.

Oracy throughout different phases of education and across all subjects.

The introduction of cross-curricular themes: Financial literacy, media literacy, climate change.

Enrichment as an entitlement for all students: access to civic engagement, arts and culture, nature, outdoor and adventure, sport and physical activities, developing wider life skills.

The introduction of citizenship in primary.

The requirement for all schools to offer triple science at GCSE.

Changes to the assessment of writing in primary.

The introduction of a reading test in year 8.

The abolition of the EBacc and change in progress 8 measures designed to accommodate greater breadth in the curriculum.

What can we learn from other OECD countries about successful curriculum reform?

OECD research into the elements of successful curriculum reform identifies key requirements:

- A clearly defined vision of the aims and purpose of the curriculum, agreed by multiple stakeholders.

- Clear and measurable objectives that can guide the implementation of the curriculum.
- The recognition that profound curriculum change takes time, supported by the establishment of a regular review cycle which can determine what is working well and what is not.
- The design of a professional development strategy. This should involve engaging stakeholders along the reform process, practitioners are best placed to know what needs to be reformed and how.
- The need for the profession to feel 'ownership' of the revised curriculum, mediated through the activity of developing learning materials, solving problems and making decisions, and embedded in the context of their own school and the nature and needs of their pupils.
- A targeted communication strategy – to the profession, parents and students, which is useful, accurate and timely and updated as the reform unfolds.
- A transparent funding strategy to support the short-, medium- and long-term implementation of the reform.
- A coherent system 'architecture' – a whole system approach which recognises that policies are not designed in a vacuum and have to articulate with the existing policy framework.
- The recognition that curriculum reforms are labour intensive and their success can depend on the organisation of the workload for teachers and staff in schools.

Two critical policies are required to ensure coherence around the reform:

- 1) provision of adequate initial teacher education and continuing professional development and
- 2) alignment of the whole evaluation and assessment framework.

This inquiry builds on the last teaching commission report, *Shaping the Future of Teaching*. It uses the OECD conditions as a template to consider to what extent the conditions are likely to be in place to successfully introduce and implement the new curriculum in English schools in 2028.

TEACHERS' AND LEADERS' AWARENESS OF CHANGE



Teachers' and leaders' awareness of change



Research conducted for the Commission by The Key group reveals that, particularly in the primary sector, there is low awareness of the differences between the current and the 2028 National Curriculum. Nearly one in ten primary leaders in a small survey reported that they are not aware of government curriculum plans. Only 14% agreed that they had read one or both of CAR and the government's response and felt confident that they could record the details.

A focus group of primary teachers organised by the [National Education Union](#) (NEU), perhaps not surprisingly given the lack of awareness of primary senior leaders, was similarly unfamiliar with the implications for them of the 2028 curriculum: *'I think I maybe briefly sort of saw something in the news quite a while ago...'* (Primary teacher)

Secondary leaders and teachers showed a significantly greater awareness of the 2028 curriculum. The Key group survey showed that nearly half had read one or both of the CAR and the government's response and 35% agreed that they felt confident that they could recall the details. The response from the NEU focus group of secondary teachers, however, was similar to their primary colleagues. Generally, they felt uninformed and unprepared: *'It maybe gets passed to Heads of Department....I've heard very little. I'm aware of some changes that are coming in...the concern for me is how are we going to staff it?'* (Secondary teacher). Even those teachers with greater awareness of the changes were clear that they did not feel 'meaningfully involved' in the process of change.

It is likely that awareness of the changes to the National Curriculum will become more widespread amongst teachers when the draft programmes of

study are published. It is, however, also important to note that teachers have multiple demands on their time and attention. Ofsted was mentioned in every focus group. Those teachers and leaders who had recently been through an inspection reported that this had taken up all their time, effort and attention. *In my school we've heard a little bit but we've just been through Ofsted, so it's been Ofsted, Ofsted, Ofsted.* (Primary teacher)

Teachers and leaders gave the strong message that, above all else, they need clarity about the changed requirements to the contents of the programmes of study. Plainly, what was 'in' and what was 'out' in terms of subject content in the revised programmes of study was repeatedly emphasised. *'I'm unsure what the purpose of the curriculum review is right now... Is it going to be a complete overhaul or what bits are going to be modernised? What are you going to take out of the curriculum to make it better?'* (Secondary teacher)

A focus group of CPD leaders also identified the need for clarity: *'making sure there's clear purpose, and understanding the very simple why. It's always really difficult as leaders to drive any change or any policy within school, ...so having that very clear direction from, you know, sort of government level does help.'*

Teachers were also unclear about their role as 'curriculum-makers'. Some felt that they are currently 'fed from the top' - *'You teach the curriculum the way that your head of department or your school would like you to teach it'* (Secondary teacher). They identified the importance of empowering teachers to be more involved in developing curriculum, particularly in incorporating local context into their teaching. *'I think teachers*

'I just think, are we even getting a valid and reliable result if all we're doing is cramming for these tests?'

Primary middle leader



would find it exciting if we were given the time to do it. I don't think there's anyone that doesn't want to make things better, to make the curriculum better.' (Secondary teacher). For ECTs in particular some school-provided resources can be useful, but teachers wanted to be involved in choosing and adapting those resources. The clear concern was the impact on workload: 'If we're going to be creators, where do we get the time to do that when we are teaching and planning the next [lesson]?' (Secondary teacher).

Teachers told us they had seen their own professional agency eroded over the past decade. They felt that preparation for the 2028 curriculum was an opportunity to put the profession back at the heart of curriculum design but that this needed a clear statement of intent from the centre, plus a revised curriculum that allows the space for it to be customised to local contexts.

The concern of Trust CPD leaders was how to balance teachers' agency to be curriculum makers with the pressures of workload. 'I feel like our main role [as a leader] is to navigate that, supporting people in creating excellent, and importantly, resources that create equity, right? So, resources that they can share and create, kind of collaboratively. I think it's our job to oversee that, so that we keep an eye, one, on workload, two, on teacher agency. But recognising that those two things might potentially come into conflict.'

There were also concerns about consistency: 'I don't want all 13 of my schools to all run off and do different things. I think that it's bad for equity, I think it's bad for workload, and actually it's bad for, then, the CPD that you might do, and all of those things. But equally, I don't want to say, here's a curriculum that we've made and you have to do it. So I think navigating a balance between those two things is what we need to do as leaders.'

Recommendations

The government must

- develop a clear communications strategy which explains how the curriculum review and its implementation aligns with the Schools White Paper, including SEND reform, so that schools are able to prioritise and plan coherent implementation.

- ensure that the new curriculum statements clearly differentiate what is essential and what is desirable and provide exemplification of a range of desirable components to encourage meaningful choices about depth and breadth.
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- Guidance for Trusts and schools on how the change programme should be implemented, ensuring opportunities for real dialogue and collaboration with the profession so that they can achieve the ambition to be 'curriculum makers'.

The digital model of the 2028 curriculum would be a good vehicle for some of these requirements.

Teachers in a range of different schools should be involved in testing and refining different elements of the new curriculum before its final implementation.

ARE THERE ENOUGH TEACHERS?



Are there enough teachers?



Improved teacher supply will be essential to the successful implementation of the 2028 curriculum.

Expert witness evidence on this issue was given to the Commission by Jack Worth, lead economist with the NFER. The latest DfE data on teacher recruitment shows that Initial Teacher Training (ITT) recruitment has improved, with primary above target. Fewer teachers are leaving the profession – down from 9% last, to 8.5% this year. The leaving rate is the lowest it has been since the School Workforce data collection began in 2010. The vacancy rate for teachers is reducing from its peak in 2023/4 which may be because of improved recruitment and retention and also a reflection of falling rolls.

The number of trainee teachers enrolled in initial teacher training courses in 2024/5 was 6.3% higher than in the previous year.

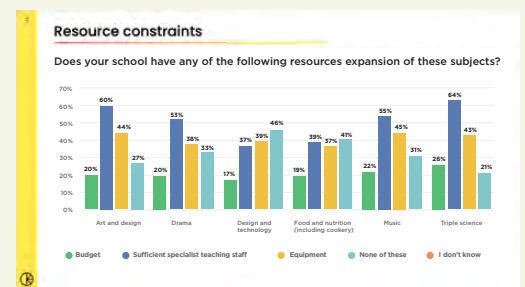
These are very welcome improvements to teacher supply. As Jack Worth noted, each percentage point improvement in retention represents thousands of teachers.

However, the government’s published forecast for 2026/27 reduces trainee recruitment targets in several subjects in which the new curriculum will expand including music, physics and religious education, and most secondary schools continue to find recruitment difficult.

The DfE’s initial teacher training targets are, moreover, calculated to maintain the status quo, replacing teachers who are leaving, balanced against falling pupil numbers. They are not calculated to replace unqualified teachers with qualified colleagues. Nor do they currently take into account the curriculum changes which will be

introduced in 2028 – in particular the requirement to offer triple science and the increase in demand for teachers of arts subjects.

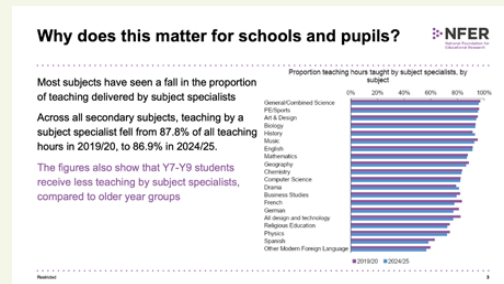
Since 2010, and after the introduction of the EBacc accountability measure, arts subjects have seen a precipitous decline of 42% in applications for ITT, reflecting a trend where more than 40% of English state schools are no longer entering any pupils for music and drama GCSEs. Those teachers have been lost from the system, and the training pipeline has dried up. The requirement for all schools to offer triple science will require higher numbers of applicants to teach sciences and the proposed changes to the Attainment 8 buckets, which are likely to raise the demand for modern foreign languages and creative subjects, will further increase demand for teachers in subjects with longstanding under-recruitment. Responses from a small sample of secondary leaders distributed by the Key Group shows their concerns about resourcing and staffing a more broadly based curriculum.



The requirement to teach the broader 2028 curriculum could result in more pupils being taught by unqualified teachers unless action is taken to improve recruitment and retention, particularly to subjects which historically failed to meet ITT targets. Overall the proportion of teaching by nonspecialist teachers has increased from 12.5%



to 13.1%. All the core subjects featured in the chart below have seen non-specialist teaching increase, which, as Jack Worth noted, is the opposite of what one would expect if the teacher supply challenge was being tackled effectively.



A trainee starting initial teacher training in September 2026 will begin teaching in September 2027, and the 2027/28 cohort will begin teaching as the 2028 curriculum becomes statutory. There is therefore one ITT cohort in which to raise specialist coverage in subjects with the longest-standing shortages.

It is also the case that the teacher supply challenge is not evenly spread across schools. As the first [Teaching Commission report](#) showed, the supply problem is greatest in the most disadvantaged schools. Teachers in these secondary schools have three years less experience on average than those in affluent schools, and the share of lessons taught by a teacher with a relevant degree in disadvantaged schools has fallen sharply over the past decade. Annual turnover in these schools is significantly higher, and posts are more likely to be unfilled or filled temporarily even though pupil-to-teacher ratios are flat across the deprivation distribution. Any implementation of the 2028 curriculum that does not weight support toward these schools risks widening rather than narrowing existing gaps.

The issue of the teacher quality gap is also the subject of a [2025 report](#) by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) which shows that teachers in disadvantaged schools are increasingly less likely

to have a relevant degree, particularly in STEM subjects, with disadvantaged schools now trailing affluent schools by 15 percentage points in the proportion of lessons taught by subject specialists.

Good teacher supply is essential not only to match the increased demands of a broader curriculum, but is also a social justice issue, so that the most deprived pupils have as much chance of being taught by teachers qualified in the subjects they are teaching as their more advantaged peers. If the broadened subject base of the 2028 curriculum is to be well taught by qualified teachers, a new approach to ITT recruitment targets should be developed by the DfE. The risk otherwise is that the pupils in those schools with the best supply of qualified teachers and stability will reap the benefits of teachers as curriculum-makers, with a more engaging and inclusive curriculum; whilst those in schools that struggle with teacher supply will have the least exposure to an enriched and inclusive curriculum that is expertly taught.

Recommendations

DfE should provide a detailed analysis of the teacher and leader recruitment and retention rate by regions, school type and subject.

- DfE should develop an implementation plan to address regional and by school type teacher shortages in particular subjects which goes beyond ITT recruitment targets (which fail to take into account historic under recruitment) and the 6,500 increase in teacher numbers. In particular there will need to be a strategy for recruiting arts teachers.
- A longer-term approach should be taken to bursaries which, evidence shows, help recruitment. Cuts in bursaries result in falls in application to ITT.
- Government should provide additional funding to disadvantaged schools to assist their recruitment and retention of qualified and specialist teachers.

A SUFFICIENT AND COHERENT PROVISION OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)



A sufficient and coherent provision of continuing professional development (CPD)



A professional development strategy is, according to the OECD, integral to the successful implementation of a new curriculum. The [Centre for Educational Studies](#) similarly notes that: 'Professional development was consistently identified as critical to successful implementation, with lack of induction, delays in training or insufficient time to participate undermining curriculum delivery across multiple systems' (p11).

Expert witness Sam Gibbs considered the current state of professional learning for teachers and leaders. She argued that currently we have a system that is increasingly strong at producing guidance, resources and programmes but not yet able to organise these into a coherent professional learning experience which is able to account for, and use, the different levels of experience and skill in the teaching profession. She argued that if professional learning is to be embedded and transformational, it needs to support teacher agency within a coherent professional architecture built on

- Shared principles and frameworks;
- Subject and pedagogical collaboration
- Inquiry-led development;
- Trust and school improvement working through professional learning; and
- Locally rooted decision-making within a wider shared direction.

Teacher expertise, Sam Gibbs told the Commission, is the exercise of judgement in complex, changing situations, noticing what pupils understand, responding to misconceptions, adapting explanations and making decisions about pacing and sequencing, within the context of the teachers' classrooms and schools.

We heard evidence of the importance of collaborative approaches that are context driven and where teachers are actively involved in trying out and evaluating new pedagogies, bring their professional knowledge of their pupils to making professional

judgements, and are informed by external experts who can enrich the quality of professional decision-making among teachers.

In view of these clear messages it is important that a 'pilot' approach is adopted to new curriculum and teaching practices rather than teachers receiving fixed versions of lesson plans and materials to which they have had no opportunity to trial and consult in the context of their own classrooms.

Evidence on the current state of CPD provision in England was given to the commission by Expert witness Gareth Conyard, Chief Executive of the Teacher Development Trust (TDT). Data from a [TDT survey](#) of CPD provision in English schools offers a calculation that about £1bn a year approximately is spent on CPD for teachers and leaders in England. This is a significant investment in raising professional standards and the benefits should not be underestimated. Teachers and leaders identify CPD around SEND as the biggest future need (39%) followed by technology integration.

Access to high-quality professional development is, however, uneven, and particularly so for teachers. Too much of the professional development that teachers and leaders undertake is felt by them to be ineffective. Over a third of participants to the TDT survey reported their professional development had limited or no impact on their ability to do their job. Only one in four teachers and leaders felt that the professional development addressed the needs of their pupils and/or was applicable to their role.

A general conclusion from the TDT evidence presented to the Commission is that whilst an entitlement to CPD is in place, the quality of the CPD offer available to teachers and leaders, and the lack of meaningful coordination and strategy, means it is far less effective than it needs to be. Perhaps the most sobering conclusion was that even if more money were spent we cannot be confident it will be effective.



It is within this context that the Commission looked at the government’s proposals for a wide range of professional support to implement the 2028 curriculum. These include:

<p>A new National Centre for Arts and Music Education, promoting arts education and enabling high quality teaching through a teacher development offer</p>	<p>Core training throughout a teacher’s career with a strong focus on high-quality adaptive teaching, formative assessment and high expectations for all</p>
<p>The doubling of the Reading Ambition for All Continuous professional development programme to over 1,300 primary schools from 2026/7</p>	<p>Oak to continue to design digital resources to be easily adaptable by teachers to meet the specific needs of their pupils, including those with SEND</p>
<p>Training more teachers to support children’s reading fluency – reaching over 600 schools in 2026</p>	<p>Oak to continue to develop a range of AI tools and curriculum materials to support readers and enable pupils to be stretched and challenged, including Oak’s AI lesson assistant Aila, which they claim will make it easier to challenge high attaining students by adapting content to their needs and abilities</p>
<p>Providing secondary teachers with access to new reading training from January 2026</p>	<p>The development of the oracy framework to provide teachers with guidance on how to formatively assess and support pupils’ oracy</p>
<p>The development of the oracy framework to provide teachers with guidance on how to formatively assess and support pupils’ oracy</p>	<p>Support for teachers to better understand pupils’ needs and how they can support social and emotional development</p>
<p>A new key stage 3 alliance as part of the RISE Partnerships offer to mobilise and spread best practice regionally and locally</p>	<p>Work with the Key Stage 3 Alliance and providers of assessment tools and data products to provide more insight on key stage 3 progress</p>

And separately announced:

A £200 million programme of SEND professional development, to support greater inclusion, with a strong focus on adaptive teaching, supported by a flexible suite of adaptive teaching strategies, case studies and real-world examples tailored to different phases of education’ and a full revision of National Professional Qualifications to strengthen the evidence for adaptive teaching and identify best practice for supporting students with SEND.

The Commissioners considered the government’s approach to have a strong and welcome emphasis on schools working together locally and regionally through RISE Partnerships and other initiatives, to learn from each other and to adopt good practice. The success of London Challenge, built on school-to-school partnerships, showed how effective cooperation can be and the principle of teachers and leaders learning from each other, developing their

professional knowledge, skills and abilities, is the right one. It is an approach which appears to be done with, rather than done to, the teaching profession.

Commissioners recognised, also, the challenge of a fragmented school system and the challenges that this would bring to consistent national provision of professional development.

But Commissioners were concerned about what appeared to be an overly piecemeal approach which does not add up to a coherent professional development strategy, particularly given the scale of the challenge facing the profession, in addition to their current excessive and intensive workload.

Expert witness Bennie Kara, co-founder of Belonging Effect, also drew our attention to the need for professional development to support diversity, equity and inclusion in schools so that it becomes ‘fundamental to the tapestry of the curriculum’ rather



than a bolt-on. Chartered College members suggested the need for a *'golden thread of DEI through curriculum, school life, staffing and professional development - including for teaching assistants'*.

Commissioners judged that the government's support for the profession to acquire the knowledge and skills to teach the 2028 curriculum reads like a list of current activities rather than a considered and planned approach. This needs to be grounded in an analysis of teachers and leaders' current experiences of professional development and their views on its quality and effectiveness in order to plan for an evidence based, high quality programme which could be adapted to the needs of different schools in different phases, settings and localities.

School leaders have a strong role to play here. Effective headteachers know the strengths of their staff, and the areas which need to be developed. They need to be able to choose high quality professional development that meets their needs and contexts, rather than relying on other organisations with products to sell. The Headteachers' Roundtable talked about the importance of heads being 'agents of change', so *'how can we capitalise on this moment in time to actually shape the professionalism that we want [to see] with the people that are delivering it?'*

This centrality of teacher agency is supported by the OECD which is clear that a national programme of professional development should engage stakeholders along the reform process. According to the OECD, practitioners are best placed to know what needs to be reformed and how; and the profession needs to feel ownership of the revised curriculum – mediated through the activity of developing learning materials, solving problems and making decisions and embedded in the context of their own school and the nature and needs of their pupils. It should recognise the different starting points of different teachers and seek to build on and share existing experience, as appropriate.

Recommendations

In consultation with a well-balanced range of experts, including serving teachers, subject associations and teacher professional networks, Government should develop a national programme of professional development to support the introduction of the 2028 curriculum, with a particular, initial focus on the

new requirements – for example oracy across the curriculum; adaptive teaching; the teaching of creative subjects in primary; and ensuring the curriculum reflects modern society and diverse communities.

This programme should be based on the following principles:

- Relevance to teachers and leaders in different phases of schools – including early years, primary and secondary.
- With a deliberate focus on developing professional identity and agency, contextual sensitivity and decision making so that teachers gain the professional capacity to understand why a practice works, when to deploy it and for what purpose.
- An inquiry design which supports the trialling and evaluation of new approaches by teachers within their own classrooms as essential to developing enhanced, contextualised, professional judgement.
- With high quality support materials which provide exemplification of good practice by phase and by subject which is presented as a basis for discussion and further development by teachers and leaders (not tablets of stone). (These should include, but not be limited to, Oak)
- With a focus on those areas of the curriculum (e.g. creative subjects) and on cross curricular themes and pedagogies (e.g. oracy and citizenship) which will necessitate significant growth in professional knowledge and pedagogical skills.
- With a focus on EDI so that teachers are able to weave EDI across the curriculum.

The current review of national professional qualifications should reflect the growing need for leaders to support and develop a culture of professional learning.

Rise Partnerships should be mandated to work with expert middle leaders to develop curriculum support programmes.

Government should work with CPD leaders to develop an immediate strategy to support schools to understand their own current curriculum strengths and weaknesses, so that they can ensure future development is based on those areas and can be appropriately contextualised.

TEACHER AND LEADER WORKLOAD



Teacher and leader workload



The [OECD](#) identifies two, essential and connected criteria that must underpin curriculum reform. These are that:

- successful curriculum reform requires a transparent funding strategy to support the short- medium- and long-term implementation of the reform.
- it is essential to recognise that curriculum reforms are labour intensive and their success can depend on the organisation of the workload for teachers and staff in schools.

The first report of the [Teaching Commission](#) demonstrated the extent to which teachers work more intensively and extensively than any other large profession. It showed that teachers in England top the international league table for working time outside lessons which doubles their working hours. The report's chapters detail the huge demands made upon teachers and leaders – demands that have grown with the increasing challenges faced by many pupils, greater inclusion of pupils with SEND, managing pupil behaviour, meeting the growing needs of pupils living in poverty and more. The report's analysis of teacher retention highlighted the fragility of the profession caused by poor teacher retention, particularly in early career and teachers who leave in their thirties when they have children.

It is welcome to note that teachers' working hours and well-being have, according to the latest evidence, begun to improve. The most recent [Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders](#) survey reports falls in working hours, in the share of teachers experiencing workplace-stress and in the share considering leaving the profession, with all wellbeing measures at their best level in the survey's history.

Nonetheless it remains the case that teachers experience too heavy workloads, too great workload intensity and high levels of stress. Only one in four teachers consider their workload acceptable and one in five full-time teachers still works over 60 hours a week. Recent, welcome improvements need to be seen in this context.

Expert witness Jack Worth's evidence to the Commission notes that previous curriculum reforms including the 1999 review of the National Curriculum and in 2014 coincided with sharp rises in teacher working hours. Curriculum change requires time, not least for teachers and leaders to:

- understand what has changed;
- create new plans or revise old ones;
- create or become familiar with new resources;
- undertake CPD in adaptive pedagogies and in exploring diversity;
- develop explanations for parents and governors of the changes;
- change assessments to match the new curriculum.

The challenge for the 2028 curriculum is to deliver change without reversing the recent gains, which means building explicit time and funding into the implementation plan.

Expert witness Shareen Wilkinson argued in her witness session to the Commission that there will be a significant workload increase involved in implementing the new and different requirements of the 2028 curriculum, and of adopting a pedagogy of adaptive teaching. This will be true of all teachers and leaders, but particularly those working in the primary sector who must know and understand

‘If this change is coming and we’re going to quite rightly be expected to do it and do it to the best of our abilities, we need time’

Primary teacher, NEU Roundtable

the changes in the programmes of study across all core and foundation subjects, introduce citizenship into the primary curriculum, understand new requirements for the key stage 2 tests in grammar and maths, prepare for new forms of moderation for key stage 2 writing, cross curricular themes, the pedagogies of oracy and adaptive teaching. And all this in addition to their current heavy workloads.

Expert witness to the Commission, Bennie Kara also emphasised the issue of time and resources to support the implementation of the 2028 curriculum. She was heartened to read the strong thread of diversity and social justice in the CAR and of the recognition that pupils from Black and Global Majority backgrounds wanted to see themselves in the curriculum.

She warned, however, that the profession cannot ‘magic time’ and that teachers need to be skilled and confident in the inclusion of diverse curriculum content which will allow pupils from global majority backgrounds to see themselves in the curriculum. Members at the Chartered College of Teaching Roundtable noted that *‘there are benefits for all children in seeing themselves and a wide range of others in the curriculum knowing the fullness of our shared heritages. In History for example, knowing there were Black Tudors, this isn’t a 20th or 21st century change. Knowing our scientific and mathematical discoveries aren’t centred in the white European countries. We borrow from, build on the knowledge of global... building on shoulders of giants from across a diverse community.’*

For teachers, time was the key concern. Both primary and secondary teachers repeated how time poor were their working days and how hard it was for them to find enough time to do the essentials of their job: *‘We as teachers don’t want to be reluctant to do these things. We want to do these things. We want our children to have all these experiences. But if you get that email or you get told: ‘OK, on this day we’re doing this’, the first thing that comes into your head is ‘Well what about.....?’ (Primary teacher, NEU Roundtable).*

‘If this change is coming and we’re going to quite rightly be expected to do it and do it to the best of our abilities, we need time.’ (Primary teacher, NEU Roundtable).

The issue of time, and of resources to support professional development and the creation and purchase of new resources to support the 2028

programmes of study must, in the view of the Commissioners, be directly addressed. There has, to date, been no indication of any extra time which will be made available to support preparation for the 2028 curriculum, despite the government and the profession’s shared endeavour to reduce workload.

‘With a new curriculum we straight away get down to practicalities. And what we need to do is allow our teachers time to breathe and connect with the core purpose of this new iteration first.’ (Leader, Chartered College of Teaching Roundtable)

The challenges for primary teachers and leaders were a particular concern to Commissioners. The broadening of the subject base in the 2028 curriculum, the introduction of Citizenship, and in particular the focus on creative subjects which primary teachers have generally received very little training in and which have not been the focus of their continuing professional development, requires focused, well-resourced professional development across the primary school system.

CPD leaders also talked about the potential for ‘implementation overload’. *‘There’s lots going on, you know, with the new white paper, curriculum reform, how each of those are going to be interpreted at school level.’ ... ‘we need to make sure that we’re clear [about] that interpretation, so that we can be strategic, and as I say, not just be reactive. We need to have time for deep thinking, and move towards design rather than compliance.’*

They spoke about the need to be *‘reasonable about this, about what we can achieve, and to implement effectively.’* Building on previous government guidance on managing workload, they recommended that *‘we need to make sure that, you know, whatever we put in place as schools is meaningful, is manageable, and is motivating’.*

Recommendations

A clear allocation of time within the normal working day should be given for teachers and leaders to engage in professional development and preparation for the implementation of the 2028 National Curriculum.

Three extra inset days in 2027 and three more in 2028 should be focused on the preparation for and implementation of the new curriculum.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND RESOURCES



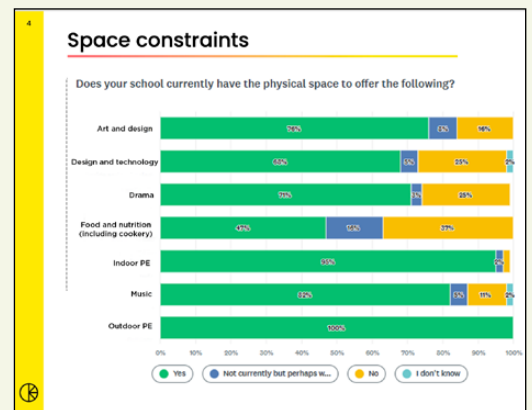
School buildings and resources



Expert witness Helen Arya conducted an extensive listening exercise in a range of schools, talking to teachers and leaders about the 2028 curriculum. It quickly became apparent that there were real concerns about the capacity of schools to accommodate a broader and more practically based curriculum.

In many of the schools she visited practical learning has been reduced due to exam pressure and limited time for hands-on work. In some, food technology is taught only once a year. Science is often limited to teacher demonstration and it was generally felt that teachers had lost confidence in incorporating practical work into their lessons as opportunities have diminished. Many spaces have been repurposed (D&T rooms, catering kitchens, outdoor spaces, workshops) reducing capacity for practical lessons, and the financial pressures that schools face means that building refurbishment has been delayed and is prioritised for essential repairs (e.g. leaking roofs). The question of where the space and resources for practical work will come from was asked frequently.

Responses from primary leaders to the Key survey reinforce this point.



As the first Commission report noted, schools have been historically underfunded, and while the current government has increased the core school budget, many schools are still operating with deficits. A revised curriculum will require new resources, including those to support increased diversity within the curriculum.

Recommendations

Based on a clear statement of what every child should be entitled to experience in the revised curriculum, the government should survey schools to gauge their ability to practically and physically accommodate the 2028 curriculum.

The government should put forward a coherent plan to fund resources needed for practical lessons, prioritising areas of greatest deprivation.



HOW INCLUSIVE IS THE 2028 CURRICULUM?



How inclusive is the 2028 curriculum?



The [OECD](#) is clear that a whole system approach is an essential component of successful curriculum reform. The absence of such an approach leaves the profession in the unenviable position of trying to reconcile competing priorities and/or opposing requirements. According to the OECD, education policy should recognise that new policies, in this case curriculum reform, should not be considered or developed without strong reference to, and articulation with, the existing and/or developing education policy framework. The following sections of the report reflect the extent to which a whole system approach is being created to support the profession in the implementation of the 2028 curriculum.

A coherent system architecture - SEND

The government's White Paper '[Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#)' signals a welcome transformation of SEND provision in mainstream schools to achieve a more inclusive mainstream school system '*where all schools consider the evolving needs of children, and proactively work to remove barriers to attainment and engagement for every child, to the benefit of all*' p34

The profession is to be supported to achieve these aims through the provision of significant funding resources, including:

- A £1.6 billion inclusion mainstream fund for schools to work collaboratively together, and with their local authorities to commission wrap-around services to support inclusion.
- A full review of the current suite of National Professional Qualifications to strengthen the evidence base for adaptive teaching and to identify best practice for supporting students with SEND.
- £200 million for SEND training for the entire profession.

These are whole system initiatives and very welcome, and in the view of the Commissioners a contrast in scale, coverage and resources to those made available for the introduction of the 2028 curriculum. They show a determination to support the profession in achieving greater inclusion in schools and significant resources to achieve these aims. However, given the scale of the inclusion challenge and the historic underfunding of schools, even this scale of financial support is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the increased demands on schools' resources.

The government is clear about the scale of the challenge to transform schools to become places that are inclusive of pupils with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It [reports](#) that '*Between 2014 and 2022 the proportion of children at secondary school reporting that they liked school 'a lot' halved.....children on free school meals are less likely to enjoy school, less likely to trust other children at school and report worse relationships with teachers than their peers, In addition children with SEND, children in need and those eligible for free school meals all report lower school belonging.*' p61

Expert witness Margaret Mulholland spoke frankly to the Commission of the clear challenges that SEND inclusion brought to the profession, including the effect on teacher wellbeing of a lack of sufficient SEND support and the prolonged uncertainty around support provision and assessment delays. This leads to wellbeing issues for teachers as they recognise that they are not able to fulfil their 'moral purpose' of meeting the needs of the pupils with SEND and the other pupils in their class. These pressures, she argued, are particularly acute for early career teachers but are reported across all stages of teachers' careers and are increasing as the numbers of pupils with SEND are escalating rapidly. Research funded by [Nuffield Foundation](#) looking at pupils born in Wales

‘I just think, are we even getting a valid and reliable result if all we’re doing is cramming for these tests?’

Primary middle leader

in 2002/3 showed almost 50% of pupils were on the SEND register at some point between reception and year 11.

The Commissioners noted with disappointment that the foundations for an inclusive curriculum whilst strongly supported in the White Paper ‘Every Child Achieving and Thriving’ are not given sufficient consideration in the CAR. The focus in the report on adaptation of the curriculum for pupils with SEND does not account for the steep rise in pupils identified as such.

The CAR fails to engage with the question of what forms of teaching and learning are necessary to motivate and engage all pupils, including those with SEND. SEND inclusion cannot only be physical inclusion, it must also be inclusion in the working life of the school - the curriculum.

Whilst the White Paper proposes a strong system of support around pupils with SEND, the 2028 curriculum may not eradicate the barriers that the current National Curriculum and its assessment has created, which restrict too many pupils with SEND and those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds from fulfilling their potential. The risk is that the attainment gap, already widening, will not be closed.

In summary, the CAR considers provision for SEND to consist of:

- Clearer, more coherent and better sequenced curriculum which will reduce unnecessary curriculum volume to allow mastery of core concepts;
- Specialist and alternative provision to retain flexibility to adapt or disapply elements where appropriate, but maintaining high ambition;
- The provision of exemplification materials to help teachers adapt the curriculum for SEND learners;
- Ensuring curriculum documents are written in ways that make adaptation straightforward and consistent;
- Ensuring that subjects are inclusive and representative so SEND learners can ‘see themselves’ in the curriculum; and
- Reviewing subjects where SEND learners have low uptake to remove unnecessary barriers.

Whilst these are all desirable and helpful approaches they are not equal to the challenge of greater inclusion in schools. Some could even undermine the clear need for expert teachers who can exercise skilful judgement and bespoke responses to needs.

The Commissioners judged that the fact that at some time in their schooling half of pupils will have some form of SEND should have provoked a more serious and sustained examination of the barriers that the current curriculum poses to these children who are also significantly more likely to come from deprived backgrounds.

For government ambitions to be met, more explicit and considered examination is needed of the ways in which the 2028 curriculum will reduce those barriers to learning identified in the review, and support good progression in learning and attainment for these pupils, and the role of schools and other agencies in supporting children’s wider needs.

Margaret Mulholland argued that the CAR implies an equation between inclusion and curriculum breadth. However, she noted that curriculum breadth does not guarantee inclusion. If the subject content is not appropriate, the attainment levels are unrealisable for too many pupils, and the assessment requirements exclude those who find exam conditions to be challenging or inaccessible, then greater inclusion will not be achieved.

Commissioners were concerned that teachers will be expected to deliver more inclusive practice without the structural conditions required to do so. Insufficient attention to developmental learning and fine sequencing of the curriculum, and weak KS2–3 transition leaves schools without the capability needed to secure progression for pupils with SEND risking further widening the attainment and achievement gap.

Margaret Mulholland argued that a truly inclusive curriculum reflects the lives and potential of all children, empowers neurodivergent learners, embraces multilingualism and gives a voice to often unheard minorities. It is not an optional layer but is foundational to high standards, increased pupil motivation and deep engagement for all.

The danger for government is that policy incoherence between the 2028 curriculum and the government's wider reform of special educational needs will curtail its wholly welcome ambitions for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

The danger for the profession is that policy incoherence will further frustrate and demoralise teachers and leaders as they try to achieve poorly aligned policy objectives.

Recommendations

The government should ensure programmes of study, resources and associated professional development start from the need for inclusion, rather than adding it later.

The government should establish, as the OECD recommends, a regular review cycle which can

determine what is working well and what is not, and what must be changed in order for the aims of the 2028 curriculum, and the White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' to be achieved. This review must be wide ranging, taking into account all stakeholders, including the profession, and should result in a staged and ordered change which is understood by teachers and manageable in terms of workload.

Government should conduct an evaluation of the proposals and programmes of study for the 2028 curriculum and its assessment through the lens of 'what does this look like' for pupils with SEND, low levels of achievement, low levels of certification and poor attendance, and those with high levels of achievement and motivation.



CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Curriculum, assessment and accountability



The first Teaching Commission report considered the heavy and extensive accountability system under which English schools operate, including tests and exams, performance measures and inspections. High-stakes accountability creates strong incentives for curriculum narrowing, as schools rationally give more time and attention to the content and outcomes that are most visible in tests and public performance measures - much of this was outlined in the [Independent Assessment Commission](#) in 2022. Reviews of inspection and accountability have also found recurring side effects such as teaching to the test, procedural compliance and superficial changes in practice rather than deep improvement. In addition, the current assessment and accountability system places disproportionate pressure on leaders and learners, particularly in schools with high numbers of pupils with SEND, where performance measures do not adequately reflect progress, context or the complexity of need, and often misrepresent a school's actual impact and performance.

These pressures intensify teachers' work, increase workload and can erode professional autonomy and wellbeing. If the 2028 curriculum is to succeed, accountability must be aligned with its aims; otherwise schools will continue to prioritise what is most heavily measured over what the reform says matters most.

The worry for Trust CPD leaders is that the current KS4 curriculum, built to meet a model of EBacc, isn't the most inclusive, making it difficult to meet the needs of those who arrive at secondary school with less fluency in language or numeracy, and that *'if we don't get the performance measures right, assessment and curriculum will end up just following that'*.

The 2028 curriculum review leaves the architecture of assessment largely in place. The CAR argues that 'the current Key Stage 4 assessment system has notable strengths that contribute to high standards and seek to ensure fairness for young people' and that 'Externally set and marked exams provide a fair and reliable indicator of what students know, understand and can do.' p133

The review does note that the time spent taking exams in England is excessive and that the volume of exams at Key Stage 4 can exacerbate the pressure that students feel. Consequently the CAR recommended, and the government accepted, a 10% (2.5 hour) reduction in exam time at GCSE.

The only explicit provision for low attaining pupils, many of whom will have SEND, is a post 16 level 1 stepped qualification offered to students who are awarded U to grade 2 in English and maths GCSE. Professor Mary Richardson, expert witness to the Commission, warned that test preparation, which dominates the English education system, will continue with the 2028 curriculum to be prioritised over teacher assessment literacy which, she argued, will create 'complex and confusing approaches to assessment of learning.' Some aspects of the assessed curriculum will dominate (providing data for schools results, league tables etc.) and will be more likely to be prioritised within what is taught. The continued reliance on exam assessment, she warned, risks a token coverage but actual neglect of important aspects of the curriculum such as oracy, practical work in science and other subjects, the engagement with the citizenship curriculum etc.

The recent interim [report](#) from Alan Milburn, Young People and Work, puts this starkly: '...the limited range of assessment approaches in Key Stage 4 in England means that some students are effectively



set up to fail. Overwhelmingly they come from less advantaged backgrounds. That is not because they lack ability. It is because the system defines ability in ways that exclude them.’ (p168)

If the limited range of assessment identified by Millburn is going to be expanded, teachers need better training in assessment literacy, including the use of formative assessment to support student learning and achievement. Expert witness to the Commission, Professor Mary Richardson argued that although there is a lot of CPD about assessment, this is not always high quality and not given enough time. Professional development in assessment needs a grounding in theory of how assessment works (grading practice for example.) The CAR, she noted, contains nothing on assessment literacy. And yet teachers need an understanding of the right assessment for different purposes, different subjects and different pupils. They need to know the consequences of each assessment and what it means for both the pupil and the teacher. At present test preparation is prioritised over assessment literacy.

Professor Richardson told the Commission that policy changes are underway globally in education, and that assessment practices – with widespread focus on high stakes testing - could be a significant part of the issues to be addressed to increase inclusion. She argued that moving educational success beyond exam results is key.

Commissioners also discussed the ‘moral panic’ related to the use of AI and other EdTech in assessment. Pupils’ use of AI is often cited as a reason that exams must stay. Professor Richardson argued that AI must not be used as an excuse to limit assessment: there is no research evidence which shows that a majority of pupils cheat. We do know that students are using Large Language Models, and so we need to regulate their use, and to assist teachers in knowing what is the student’s own work.

Unfortunately, this response to the technology is making assessment reform ‘glacially slow’.

Teachers need support to manage and diminish the threat of AI, for example by setting assessment tasks which would be difficult for students to outsource to AI. This, Professor Richardson argued, would require teachers to become more expert in assessment literacy. Pupils, she argued, also need to become more assessment literate so that they had a better understanding of the purpose of assessment and would be less motivated to circumvent the learning process.

Expert witness Margaret Mulholland warned that retaining high-stakes exams as the ‘fairest’ system meant that there will be no adoption of adaptive, modular and authentic assessment methods that could better support learners with SEND, mental health needs or anxiety. She pointed out that the CAR delays provision of qualifications for students with SEND who cannot access the mainstream curriculum until post 16 with the introduction of L1 and L2. She was concerned that the current narrow qualification requirements, which will be largely retained in the 2028 curriculum, will retain the current curriculum inflexibility which, she said, ‘drives a deficit in inclusion.’

Expert witness Helen Arya also argued for a coherent alignment of curriculum, assessment and accountability. Without this, the government’s ambitions for inclusion, improved belonging and reduced attainment gaps will remain out of reach, and policy incoherence will continue to frustrate and demoralise the profession. Attempts to include, she said, will continue to exclude.

Assessment was a key concern of teachers and leaders in focus groups, across primary and secondary. For primary teachers, assessment was seen to be driving the curriculum. Instead, they favoured lower-stakes, and more frequent checkpoints, rather than the current high-stakes, summative structure.

‘I just think, are we even getting a valid and reliable result if all we’re doing is cramming for these tests?’
(Primary middle leader)



'..the amount of time that we put into it is not proportional... It's like how much time are we actually putting into this to the detriment of some of their key number skills, for example' (Primary teacher)

'We are meant to differentiate in our lessons, but we don't really differentiate in our exams' (Secondary teacher)

'They're reducing the time, which is great, it means they're not in that hall as much and some of those students who can't sit for long periods of time, that might benefit them. But students who find school a tricky place to be in the first place, I feel like an exam component isn't necessarily what they should have to bank on to be able to get a grade.' (Secondary teacher)

Commissioners were concerned that the retention of the architecture and structure of the current assessment arrangements at key stage 4 will create competing objectives for the profession. To what extent, they asked, will adaptive teaching – the bedrock of the government's advocated approach to the inclusion of pupils with SEND and their engagement with the curriculum, be attainable for teachers working in the English education system which tops the international league tables for the prevalence of memorisation, rehearsal, routine exercises, drill and practice and bottom for the promotion of 'deep learning' involving complex cognitive activation strategies. When one-third of pupils year on year fail to attain a Grade 4 or above in core English and maths GCSE examinations at age 16, more scrutiny is needed of the assessment model that identifies failure on this scale after 12 years of compulsory education.

The danger is that the government's laudable ambitions to create a world class curriculum which reduces the social economic gap in relation to education which it notes remains 'stubbornly wide' and to ensure that the system 'reflects high expectations of all and properly supports young people's progress and achievements' (CAR, p9) , will fail because of the lack of coherence between the

content of the 2028 curriculum and the continued dominance of timed exams.

Accountability was a key concern for school leaders. A focus group from the Headteachers' Roundtable talked about how *'the accountability dog wags our tail.'* *'If it doesn't appear on the Ofsted accountability framework, it's unlikely to be in our curriculum.'* *The concern is that this constrains leaders so that they're 'not delivering a curriculum that truly mirrors where [young people] are going to go and work and earn their money and be citizens. So the more prescriptive what the government says and what accountability says it needs to be, the less I can do my job.'*

They also agreed that it feels as if *'DfE and Ofsted are playing two different games, and one's got a massive stick!'*

Recommendations

The government should, as part of a regular review of the 2028 curriculum changes, review the effectiveness of its assessment reforms in light of:

- The extent to which a 10% time reduction in GCSE testing leads to improved pupil outcomes, particularly for those pupils with low attainment and SEND (and the extent to which 10% reduction in exam time actually translates in the reduction of content and test preparation time).
- The extent to which the profession is confident in the use of formative assessment to underpin adaptive teaching.
- Evidence that advises against over-reliance on high stakes end-point exams and tests by considering what forms of knowledge and skills require exam based assessment and what could effectively be assessed through modules, practical or teacher assessments.
- Commissioned research on the extent to which AI is misused in student assessment, and time for teachers to engage meaningfully with technology to support assessment design.

CONCLUSION



Conclusion



Whilst strongly supportive of the government’s aims for the 2028 curriculum and its strong drive for more effective and greater inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, the Commission’s investigations raised serious concerns about whether these ambitions will be realised in practice. The sense that the writers of the curriculum and assessment review 2028 developed their analysis and proposals in isolation from the authors of Every Child Achieving and Thriving is inescapable. The danger that inconsistent policy architecture will undermine the government’s aims and the professional endeavours of teachers and leaders is real.

To this end, the Commission makes a final recommendation – which is that the implementation of the 2028 curriculum be phased in order to support ongoing evaluation of what is working and what is not.

This approach is described by the Centre for Educational Studies (CES) in its [report](#) on Curriculum Policy adopted by high performing OECD nations including Japan and Singapore where reform of the National Curriculum is guided by national strategy, evidence cycles and expert advisory processes. Directed coordinated planning is long term, and expertise supports policy stability.

This approach contrasts strongly with another model described by the CES in which government driven reform is directed by government with a small expert group drafting content quickly. Implementation happens at once with no, or only limited, piloting. Consultation mainly follows drafting. Evaluation uses existing assessment and inspection systems.

This is the approach to curriculum reform in England. It achieves rapid change but risks instability and incoherence as teachers and leaders try to make sense of big changes in their professional practice within a wide variety of school contexts, with unequal access to financial and physical resources, professional support, teacher and leader expertise and experience.

‘Teachers are where policy meets reality. If it doesn’t work for the teachers, then it doesn’t work’ (teacher, Chartered College of Teaching). The curriculum and its assessment is at the heart of teachers’ professional practice. The profession will want to get this right and to achieve the lasting change that the government envisages for the nation’s children and young people. The Commission recommends this more gradual and manageable approach in the interests of all stakeholders – and in particular the pupils for whom the curriculum provides the basis for their engagement with knowledge, their experience of learning and their sense of self.

Recommendations

The government should, as is routine in other high performing OECD countries, adopt a cycle of regular, strategic and expert guided reform of the National Curriculum and its assessment.

The new curriculum should involve a phased introduction, allowing for piloting and ‘lessons learned’ and a CPD strategy to be put in place incrementally, to ensure teacher engagement with the changes in a manageable way that helps to ensure quality of teaching and protecting teachers and leaders from overload.

ANNEX

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 The Key Group
 National Education Union (NEU)
 NAHT
 Schools Week
 UCL Institute of Education

ROUNDTABLES

NEU: Primary, Secondary, Middle Leaders (see [NEU report](#))
 Chartered College of Teaching: The Commitments to Diversity in the
 National Curriculum, and Teacher CPD and Agency
 HeadTeachers Roundtable
 Trust Wide CPD Leaders Network
 (With thanks to Sam Gibbs and Adam Kohlbeck
 for leading many of these)



Teaching
Commission

